

102 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

an artisan, Macaulay after quoting a
remark made in
Parliament says :

Other evidence is extant, which proves
that a shilling
a day was the pay to which the English
manufacturer then
thought himself entitled but that he was often
forced to
work for less. The common people of that
age were not
in the habit of meeting for public discussion, of
haranguing,
or of petitioning Parliament. No newspaper
pleaded their
cause. It was in rude rhyme that their love
and hatred,
their exultation and their distress found
utterance. A
great part of their history is to be learned only
from their
ballads. One of the most remarkable of the
popular lays
chanted about the streets of Norwich and
Leeds in the
time of Charles the Second may still be read on
the original
broadside. It is the vehement and bitter cry
of labour
against capital. It describes the good old
times when
every artisan employed in the woollen
manufacture lived
as well as a farmer. But those times were
past. Sixpence
a day was now all that could be earned by
hard labour at
the loom. If the poor complained that they
could not live
on such a pittance, they were told that they
were free to
take it or leave it. For so miserable a
recompense were
the producers of wealth compelled to toil,
rising early and
lying down late, while the master clothier,
eating, sleeping,
and idling, became rich by their exertions. A
shilling a
day, the poet declares, is what the weaver
would have, if
justice were done. We may therefore conclude
that, in the

generation which preceded the Revolution, a
workman
employed in the great staple manufacture of
England
thought himself fairly paid if he gained six
shillings a
week.¹

As to public events ballads have a very
similar value.
Sometimes we get rugged verses on a siege
or a battle or
a seafight, by men who took part in them ;
oftener the
ballads on such incidents are merely rhymed
versions of

¹1, 410-12 (iii).